

## INTELLOFAX 12 INFORMATION REPORT

CD NO.

COUNTRY Czechoslovakia

DATE DISTR. 10 February 1953

SUBJECT Comments on the Significance of the  
Slansky Trial

NO. OF PAGES 7

25X1 PLACE  
ACQUIREDNO. OF ENCLS.  
(LISTED BELOW)25X1 DATE OF  
INFO.SUPPLEMENT TO  
REPORT NO.

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1. General. The construction of the indictment and of the factual basis of the trial was so obviously artificial and false that it bordered on clumsiness. The trial had such a broad scope because it was actually a struggle for absolute power over the Party and the State between Gottwald and Slansky, an attempt to justify the economic failure of the Communist regime, and an anti-Semitic campaign ordered by Moscow, probably for reasons of international policy (Israel v. the Arab States).
  2. The political-economic aim of the trial was clearly evident from the course of the trial. For trial reasons, i.e. to prove the guilt of the carefully selected accused, it was necessary to project this scope against a background of treason, sabotage, and espionage. This framework was unconvincing from the factual point of view, because it was based largely on fictitious and purposely distorted evidence; likewise from the formal point of view, the statements of the accused give the clear impression of memorized and carefully prepared lectures. It can therefore be presumed that the wide publicity given to the trial by the Prague radio will certainly fail to have the desired effect on the masses of the population -- on the contrary it provides a rich source for anti-propaganda material.

The reasons why such a trial was even staged (there had long been doubts that it would take place) are mostly a matter of speculation. The economic situation was certainly one of the main reasons. The acts of sabotage involving billions of Czech crowns, in which the accused confessed, were to provide an excuse in the eyes of the Czechoslovak public for the decline in the standard of living in Czechoslovakia and for the failure to fulfill the ever increasing demands made on the Czechoslovak industry by Moscow. The domination of Titoism was also undoubtedly an important motive. It can be no doubt that even many ardent Czechoslovak nationalists (so-called nationalists) disagreed with the shameless influence of the Soviets in the internal affairs of Czechoslo-

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vakia, and that even the Communist rank and file were growing tired of the forcible imitation of "glowing Soviet examples". The removal of the Jewish element from the leading positions in the Party, government and administration has long been a part of Stalin's policy, and was probably dictated by Moscow.

4. The surprising factor, however, is that the trial clearly demonstrated to every Czechoslovak Communist that the leadership of the Communist Party was in the hands of persons whom the trial classified as scamps, traitors and spies, and that it had been in their hands for long years (in the case of some of the accused, their activities are said to date back many years before World War II), and that during this entire period of time they enjoyed the confidence of the Party and Moscow. The entire trial, in my opinion, shows the public that these high Party and government officials extended their nefarious activities throughout the state into every sector of public life, whether economic, political, or military. From this point of view, the publication of details on the course of the trial was obviously bad propaganda, which must necessarily create disappointment, mistrust, or even hopelessness among the ordinary Communists, and uncertainty and fear of the future among the Communist officials.
5. The initiation of the trial was sudden, without any previous notice. On 20 November 1952, at 07.00 hours, the Prague radio announced that at 09.00 hours on that day, the proceedings would begin. In this can be seen an element of precaution, and it can be presumed that other extensive safety measures were taken. The delay in the opening of the trial (one year had elapsed since the arrest of Slansky) can be attributed to several circumstances. A long period of time must have been required for piecing together the material for the trial to make the pieces fit together and give the impression of a great conspiracy against the state. It must have also taken the accused a considerable length of time to memorize their confessions.

Public opinion had to be considered. Slansky, for instance, shortly before his arrest, in July 1951, had received the highest Communist order.

6. This trial is merely the opening of a series of other trials involving offenders of a lower category. This is apparent since there were a number of witnesses at the trial, and a number of officials named, who are under arrest. The latter were either designated as direct members of the conspiratorial espionage center or as traitors, spies, saboteurs, or bourgeois nationalists. Apart from that, the accused themselves testified that they had a large number of collaborators of all categories in every sector of the Party and state apparatus.
7. The trial itself can be classified as the greatest to take place in a Communist dominated country during the past 16 years, i.e. since the time of the Great Purge in the USSR (Zinoviev, Tukhachevsky and their associates). It is the greatest not only in the number of accused, their position and significance in the Party and state, but also in the extent of influence which the trial has and will have on the internal structure of the Party, on its general policy, and on Czechoslovak public opinion, whether pro- or anti-Communist.

It is quite possible that this trial was a necessary measure to precede the announced Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which was to be a copy of the recent Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, and at which a new general policy of the Party was to be outlined. Prior to the inauguration of this Congress, the Party had to be cleared of all elements opposing the Moscow line.

ty within the Party. From the point of view of security within the Communist Party, the trial presents a very sad picture to the ordinary Communist. He learns that all these Communist leaders were of

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bourgeois origin, that they were not real Communists at all (many of them not even from the time they joined the Party), that they worked against Party interests, and that they had been betraying it for long years.

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[redacted] Clementis' release from custody in France in 1940. It is true that President Benes and other Czechoslovak politicians showed a great interest in his release. This interest was mainly dictated by the fact that Clementis was a Slovak intellectual and man of letters. [redacted] the clause which Clementis had to sign prior to his release consisted of a pledge to the effect that he would not engage in any political activity on the soil of France. This was the usual formula in such cases, and was not in any way specifically adjusted to Clementis' case. The testimony of Jircik, who appeared before the Court as a former member of the Surete Nationale, and who had allegedly been present at the negotiations with Clementis, is false and was probably extorted. It is true, however, that Clementis fell from the grace of Moscow following his release. This happened because he disagreed with the views held by Moscow at that time on the war between the Western Powers and Germany (the Soviet Union, at that time neutral and preparing to sign the well-known treaty with Germany, classified this war as a bourgeois affair which would weaken the parties involved and would thus assist the Soviet Union), and because he had allowed himself to be freed from a bourgeois prison by bourgeois politicians and had thus hesitated to suffer for the Communist cause.

12. The evidence against Slansky and Reicin about the beginning of their collaboration with the Czechoslovak police in the first instance and with the Gestapo in the second instance gives the impression of positive fabrication.
13. In the case of those who were accused of beginning their treasonable activities in England, the facts can be boiled down to the statement that some of them held positions in the official apparatus of the provisional Czechoslovak Government in London (Frejka, Sling, Loehli); there they naturally carried out their official duties, whether well or badly, and this the trial classified as a crime.
14. Geminder, whom the indictment tried to describe as an impostor of lesser importance and an old traitor, was placed in Prague by Moscow as a significant member of the Cominform and, while in power, governed Czechoslovak policy, especially in the international field, from behind the scenes and in accordance with instructions from Moscow.
15. All the accused, [redacted] were one hundred per cent fanatical Communists who fell victim either to their personal aspirations or to a deviation from the general line, and were then selected as sacrificial lambs for the failures of the regime.
16. It may be interesting to note the tone of hatred towards Benes which prevailed throughout the trial, while the name of Masaryk, apart from one general instance, was not mentioned at all, although this would have been logical in connection with Clementis. [redacted] that the trial gave Benes a certainly undesired publicity among the anti-Communist elements of the Czechoslovak population.

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17. Effect on the Military. The trial also touched on the subject of the Army in a careful, hesitating, and more or less general way. The indictment contains an accusation, in regard to Slansky, Reicin, and others, that they appointed reactionary officers of high rank to high positions in the Army, and that they intentionally and systematically sabotaged the purging of the Czechoslovak Army of Fascist elements and prevented its regeneration in the regular democratic spirit. The accused pleaded guilty to all of the indictment.

18. The following officers were mentioned in the trial as being reactionaries, who most probably are now in prison:

- a. General Josef Bartik                      Formerly in Ministry of Interior, arrested in February 1948.
- b. Army General Bohumil Bocek              Former Chief of Staff, according to a reference in the trial already sentenced for treason and espionage.
- c. Air Force Lt. Ludvik Budin              last assignment III Air Force Corps at Brno.
- d. Brig. General Rudolf Bulandr            Assistant Deputy to the Chief of General Staff.
- e. Army General Simon Dryac                Former Chief of Staff.
- f. General (Vaclav?) Drnec                Former Chief of Artillery in the Ministry of National Defense.
- g. Army General Karel Klapalek            Former Commander of the First Military District in Prague.
- h. Lt. General Kouril (fnu)                Last assignment unknown; after 1945 was chief of the presidium of the Ministry of National Defense.
- i. Army General Zdenek Novak              Former Commander of the Second Military District in Brno.
- j. SMU General Josef Pavel                Former Deputy Minister of National Security.
- k. Lt. General Frantisek Talasek          Last assignment Commander of IV Corps at Brno.

19. The following anti-communist officers were mentioned:

- a. Army General Antonin Basal            Former chief of the Military Section of the Office of the President of the Republic, at present in the USA.
- b. Air Force General Karel Janousek      Former Czechoslovak Air Force Commander who is in prison for attempting to escape.
- c. Army General Alois Liska              Former Commander of the Staff College, at present in England.
- d. General Frantisek Moravec            Former chief of Intelligence, who escaped after the coup d'etat. (Was mentioned only as being chief of the CIS in England during the war.)
- e. Div. General Heliodor Pika            Former Deputy Chief of Staff who was executed.

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20. Most of the high-ranking officers mentioned in paragraph 18 acted as fervent Communists following the coup d'etat in 1948; many of them before that. It can be said that all of them did so not from conviction, but from opportunism and careerism. All were ardent servants of the regime. All had been removed from the Army long before the arrest of Slansky, within the scope of the purge of officers of bourgeois origin and followers of Western doctrines.
21. It is interesting to note that the former Minister of National Security, Ladislav Kopriva, has succeeded in evading the dock and that the responsibility for the lack of vigilance and failures of the security organs fell on his Deputy, Svab. He had been deprived of his post as Minister of National Security, but reappeared shortly afterwards in a fairly high post at the Ministry of Interior. It is probable that the victorious wing of the Communist Party is indebted to him for some important service, and it is therefore possible that he will appear again in the future in some key position in the Party or State.
22. It is also interesting that there was no mention in the trial of Army General Ludvik Svoboda, former Minister of National Defense, later Deputy Prime Minister and head of the State Office for Physical Training and Sport. He was removed from the Government on 8 September 1951. Although he later appeared about twice in public as a participant at some celebration, it is obvious that he is destined for oblivion and liquidation.
23. Bribe Accusations. In the matter of espionage, i.e. in the delivering of secret information to foreign Powers, the confessions of the accused were weakest and fabrication was most apparent.
24. In some cases, contact with representatives of Western Powers, which took place in the line of official duty, was considered as espionage. This mainly concerned Clementis and his representatives (Deputies) London and Hajdu, and their contacts with diplomats of the Western Powers; the same also applies to the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Trade Loebel and Margolius; Reicin's contact with the Yugoslav Military Attache prior to the Cominform's denunciation of Tito as a traitor can likewise be considered as an official contact. Tito's Yugoslavia altogether played an important role in the trial; all were charged with collaborating with Yugoslavia prior to her departure from the Cominform, and it was claimed that they knew, or should have known at that time, that Tito was a traitor to Communism.
25. [REDACTED]
26. Slansky admitted that he furnished information of an intelligence nature to General Fika while the latter was head of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR. [REDACTED] Their relations were tense, even hostile, which is natural in the case of two persons who were ideologically, politically, and personally antagonistic. It is possible that Slansky told Fika that he would give him some information on Czechoslovak partisans. It is almost certain that Slansky never gave him such information.
27. The testimony of Karkovsky with reference to the letter inviting Slansky to escape to the West was not stressed in either the indictment or the court proceedings. However, the interception of this letter was undoubtedly one of the major factors leading to the arrest of Slansky. Gottwald declared in a speech on 7 December 1951 that "undeniable evidence

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has fallen into our hands that the espionage service of the Western imperialists is organizing and preparing the escape of Rudolf Slansky to the West ...". In the same speech Gottwald admitted that as late as September 1961, the government was not yet in possession of any concrete evidence showing that Slansky was a direct enemy of the State.

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29. **Conclusions.** The trial has certainly created an unfortunate situation for defections, not only from the ranks of anti-Communist elements, but also in the cases of those Communist individuals who have so far not been affected by the purge, knowing that sooner or later they will be chosen as sacrificial lambs for some Communist failure or fall victim to denunciations. Presumably, this was borne in mind by the authorities in Prague when they decided to stage the trial at the end of November, i.e. at a time when an escape from Czechoslovakia is made very difficult, if not impossible, by the snow conditions on the mountains at the border.

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30. The defection of Communist officials attached to diplomatic missions in the Western Nations should likewise be made easier as a result of the trial. Each recall, each order for an official trip to Prague will be interpreted as a sign of displeasure or mistrust leading to interrogation and arrest. This will certainly apply even to those who are not aware of any transgression against the regime or the Party. Typical of this is the case of Goldstuecker who appeared as a witness at the trial. He was Czechoslovak Minister to Israel when he received an order transferring him to Stockholm. He was ordered to travel to his new assignment via Prague. Unsuspecting, he was arrested in Prague as a Zionist monster of Slansky and Clementis.
31. There can be no doubt that the Draconic sentences just passed by the State Court, and the number of arrests which preceded and which will certainly follow the trial, will serve, at least temporarily, to produce an intimidating effect on the population.
32. On the other hand, the trial gave a certainly undesired (and basically incorrect) picture to the effect that espionage, sabotage and other activities harmful to the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia have been carried out on the highest levels of the Party and State apparatus for a long period of time -- unobserved and without punishment. The simple citizen must have the impression that nothing remains a secret from the Western powers and that nothing can remain a secret. The prestige of the West has undoubtedly grown in the eyes of the anti-Communist part of the Czechoslovak population, and so has the appreciation of the West's possibilities of infiltration behind the scene of Czechoslovak political and economic life.

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